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A Report To The  
Virginia Marine Resources Commission  
On the Possible Occurrence of Crowded Oysters  
On Drumming Ground in the Rappahannock River

by  
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February 14, 1985

VIMS Marine Resource Report #85 - 1

## A Survey of Oysters on Drumming Ground

On February 13, 1985 at the request of Mr. Ben Daniels we surveyed a buoyed area of oyster bottom on Drumming Ground. The study was made on the VMRC vessel Wolf Trap. On board was Daniels, Haven, Register, Hudson, O'Brien, Kellum and Abbot.

We made 6-8 dredge hauls in the area and about 10-15 grabs with patent tongs. The results are shown in th tables 1 and 2.

Four patent tongs boats were "working" the area when we arrived.

### Summary of Results

1. Numbers of oysters (all sizes) ranged from 190-220 per bushel--this is too low for moving economically.
2. From 47 to 55% of the oysters in each sample were less than 3 inches long.
3. A majority of the oysters were elongate with thin bills which could be easily broken. Growth last summer was excellent.
4. From 42% to 66% of the oysters occurred as "singles." From 28% to 42% occurred as "doubles." From 11% to 14% occurred as clusters of 3 or 4 oysters.
5. The large number of singles (42%-66%) is due, in all probability, to harvest and culling by the patent tongs which have "worked" the area for several weeks.
6. There were few boxes in the samples; mortalities based on their data were low and tonged from 8% to 9%.
7. Meats of the oysters were only average quality; because of the thinness of the shell, they might shuck about 4 pints per bushel.

8. The occurrence of cat-tongued or elongated oysters in this area is puzzling. It is possible that in the past, they were crowded thereby producing the observed growth pattern. However, their densities today, cannot be considered as crowded.
9. There is also the possibility that some time in 1982, a layer of sandy-silt moved into the area, thereby forcing oysters to grow in this pattern. However, there is no evidence that they are being covered at this time.